

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913) 1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

No 1)

Indian Tribes of the Argentine and Bolivian Chaco.

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must then be on the alert and have his horses and mules well secured. The settlers generally hunt the jaguar by means of hounds, of which of course a great number must be used. Badly attacked by its assailants, the beast at last seeks refuge in climbing a tree, where it is generally easily shot. 136

The natives stand in great fear of the jaguar, looking upon it as the incarnation of an evil spirit, and the beast does in fact seem to have far less respect for the Indian than for a white man. In the religion and mythology of the Chaco Indians the jaguar plays an important part. 125

The puma is rare, and the same may be said of the maned wolf (*Canis jubatus*) which is reported to exist in the Chaco, for I never saw or heard of any. The fox is very common on the plains, and its howling or barking is one of the characteristic sounds interrupting the silence of night. Of birds there is no great variety in the Chaco. Doves, wild turkeys, and small parrots are, in addition to ostriches, the birds most commonly seen in the pampas regions and forests. Only at the big lagoons, found here and there in the interior of the country, may one notice a rich bird-life, especially during the dry season. Ducks of different kinds, white and yellow herons, storks, and other aquatic birds in countless numbers give life to these places, whither also many animals of the forest descend to allay their thirst. 136

Venomous snakes, even rattlesnakes, are quite common on the plains, especially during the dry season. Both in the river Pilcomayo and in the lagoons alligators are found, although in the Argentine and Bolivian Chaco they are not as numerous as in the Rio Paraguay. The rivers moreover abound in fish, and all the Pilcomayo tribes live mainly by fishing.

Insect-life is very rich in summer-time. Different kinds of mosquitoes, crickets, large beetles, and especially the Cicada with its shrill whistling, shortly before sunset and at night fill the air with their weird sounds, innumerable croaking frogs joining in the concert. These manifestations of lower animal life, as they are perceived at sunset, are, I believe, the things that most impress a traveller in the Chaco.

Although mosquitoes are numerous and troublesome in the summer, the climate is on the whole healthy. Malarial fever does not occur, except when it is occasionally introduced by settlers or other white men. Rheumatism and catarrhs are the ailments from which the natives most commonly suffer. [164]

The scarcity of water has been the greatest obstacle to the exploration of the Chaco. In the Bolivian Chaco the traveller preferably keeps to 133 ●

●133 the river Pilcomayo, following its sinuous course, and this is practically the only way known to white people hitherto. An explorer who undertook to penetrate at random into the interior of the unknown country east of the river, without being accompanied by Indian guides, would be almost sure to perish from thirst within a few days. Many promising expeditions into the Chaco have ended disastrously in this way. Only the natives know where the few water places are to be found. Generally these consist of small pools, the stinking brown or green water of which seems almost undrinkable to a white man; but the explorer soon finds it good enough even for him and it will save the life both of man and beast.

648 Another danger to the explorer is the hostility of the savage natives who inhabit the country. This aspect of the Chaco tribes has become almost proverbial owing to the fact that several explorers have met a disastrous end at the hands of the savage Indians. In our own days the best known of these unfortunate explorers are Crevaux, Ibaretta, and Boggiardi, of whom the first mentioned was killed by the Toba Indians on the banks of the Rio Pilcomayo, at the place which still bears his name. Several expeditions have tried to explore the country, following the course of the Pilcomayo down to its confluence with the Rio Paraguay, but the first which succeeded was the Bolivian expedition under D. Campos in 1883. The interior of the Chaco, however, is still to a great extent unknown, and ethnographic exploration of this interesting country did not begin until a few decades ago.

114 The above description of the Chaco has particular reference to the Argentine and Bolivian Gran Chaco and more especially to the region on both sides of the river Pilcomayo, of which I have acquired personal knowledge. My ethnological studies have in fact been limited to the most important of the tribes inhabiting that region, tribes which, when I first visited them, were very imperfectly known. The Pilcomayo is the largest of the few affluents that the great river Paraguay receives from the west. For the main part of its course the river flows through very little known country, and the tribes that have settled on its banks or roam about on the grassy plains or in the thickets of the interior still live completely — or at any rate did live at the time when I visited them — in a state of nature. The most important of these tribes are the Mataco, the Choroti, the Tobas, and the Aahlulay, who live partly on the right (Argentine), partly on the left (Bolivian) side of the river. The Mataco, the Choroti, and the Aahlulay, who linguistically are closely related to each other, form a group of their own. The Tobas, although a typical Chaco tribe, both

114 The way which leads from Embarcación up to Bolivia is what is called a *camino carrtero*, a broad road suitable for big carts drawn by mules. It is illustrative of the primitive means of communication in Bolivia that nearly all articles of commerce had to be transported along this road up to such distant places as Santa Cruz de la Sierra and Mojos in the heart of Bolivia — a journey which takes months to accomplish. My own nearest goal was a place called Yacuiba, a big village which at that time belonged to Bolivia, but a few years later on was annexed by Argentine. The journey from Embarcación to Yacuiba takes seven days. Embarcación is situated on the bank of the Rio Bermejo, a tributary of the Pilcomayo, and this river had to be crossed, the mules swimming over it. Having a few hours later passed the small village Miraflores, we arrived at the open plains varied with small forests which here form the westernmost part of the enormous territory of the Gran Chaco. These regions are almost uninhabited; only isolated *tolderias* (villages) of the Mataco Indians are found, from which occasionally we could hear the beating of drums or the incantations of the medicine-men, when they were trying to call forth rain or to drive away evil disease-bringing spirits. The scarcity of water in fact was great, for although it was the beginning of the rainy season very little rain had as yet fallen, and at the halting-places it was generally difficult to find water for the beasts. In a place called Bomba, inhabited by a lonely settler, we had to pay for the drinking-water, which was brought from a distant pool near the cordilleras rising in the west.

114 About midway between Embarcación and Yacuiba lies the village Tartagal, which at that time only consisted of a couple of poor houses. In 133 this region nature entirely changes its aspect. The traveller, having previously marched for days through open plains and thickets, suddenly enters a virgin forest of almost tropical grandeur, where the great variety of climbers and creepers, covering not only the giant trees but also bushes and plants, especially attracts attention. This is a type of scenery which is only met with in the vicinity of the Andes, never in the interior of the Chaco. We had to march a couple of days through this interesting primeval forest before we again came out on the plains. Just north of Tartagal there is the small village Aguaray — like all villages in this region, rather a group of primitive ranches — whence it is only one day's journey to Yacuiba.

Yacuiba was formerly a place of bad repute, being a resort of criminals and adventurers of the kind so frequently met with in places far away from the centres of civilization in Argentine and Bolivia. At the

114 time of my stay in Yacuibá conditions were much improved, and the village has since made considerable progress, chiefly owing to some foreign commercial houses which have established themselves there. Yacuibá has now several hundred inhabitants, among whom there is a small number of Europeans. The village became my head-quarters for the whole time that I travelled in the Chaco. One of the foreigners, Don Carlos Holzer, did me great service in helping me to get peons and to prepare for my expeditions into different parts of the country.

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491 There are two roads leading from Yacuibá to the river Pilcomayo; the one, passing through the village of Caiza, takes the traveller to the small place called Crevaux; the other leading directly along the line at the 22nd degree of latitude to the Bolivian fort d'Orbigny. Both these places are situated close to the river, the former a few leagues to the north of the latter. On my first expedition to the Pilcomayo in November 1911 I took the second road, the one leading to d'Orbigny. From Yacuibá this place can be reached in three days, travelling on horseback. In addition to the riding-mules I had three baggage mules and was accompanied by two peons none of whom had been at the Pilcomayo before. These regions are entirely uninhabited; there are neither settlers nor Indian villages.

● [133] The way goes partly through deep forests, partly through arid deserts and — near the river — through grassy plains. The right (Argentine) bank of the Pilcomayo is extremely flat; it is difficult to imagine more monotonous scenery.

114 At d'Orbigny a small body of ten Bolivian soldiers commanded by a lieutenant was garrisoned and I had counted on their assistance at the crossing of the Pilcomayo, which in the rainy season is very broad and rapid. The fort, however, turned out to be situated on the opposite side of the river and was not even visible from the spot where we were. No human being could be seen on whom it would have been possible to call for assistance. At last we caught sight of two Indians who had swum over the river from the opposite bank evidently for the sake of fishing on the Argentine side where the water is lower. They were Toba Indians who knew enough Spanish to inform us that there was absolutely no canoe to be had either on this or the other side of the river, and that all must cross it by swimming, even the mules. Since the Pilcomayo at this place has a breadth of nearly one mile, it seemed by no means a trifle to cross it with the baggage and the mules. Happily the rainy season had not yet properly begun, so the river was comparatively low. The Indians offered to help us take over the beasts and for this purpose went in search



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The left (Argentine) side of the Pilcomayo, where the country is extremely flat.



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On the right (Bolivian) side the Pilcomayo in some places forms high walls (serruencas).

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River scenery from the middle course of the Pilcomayo.



The Pilcomayo during an inundation.

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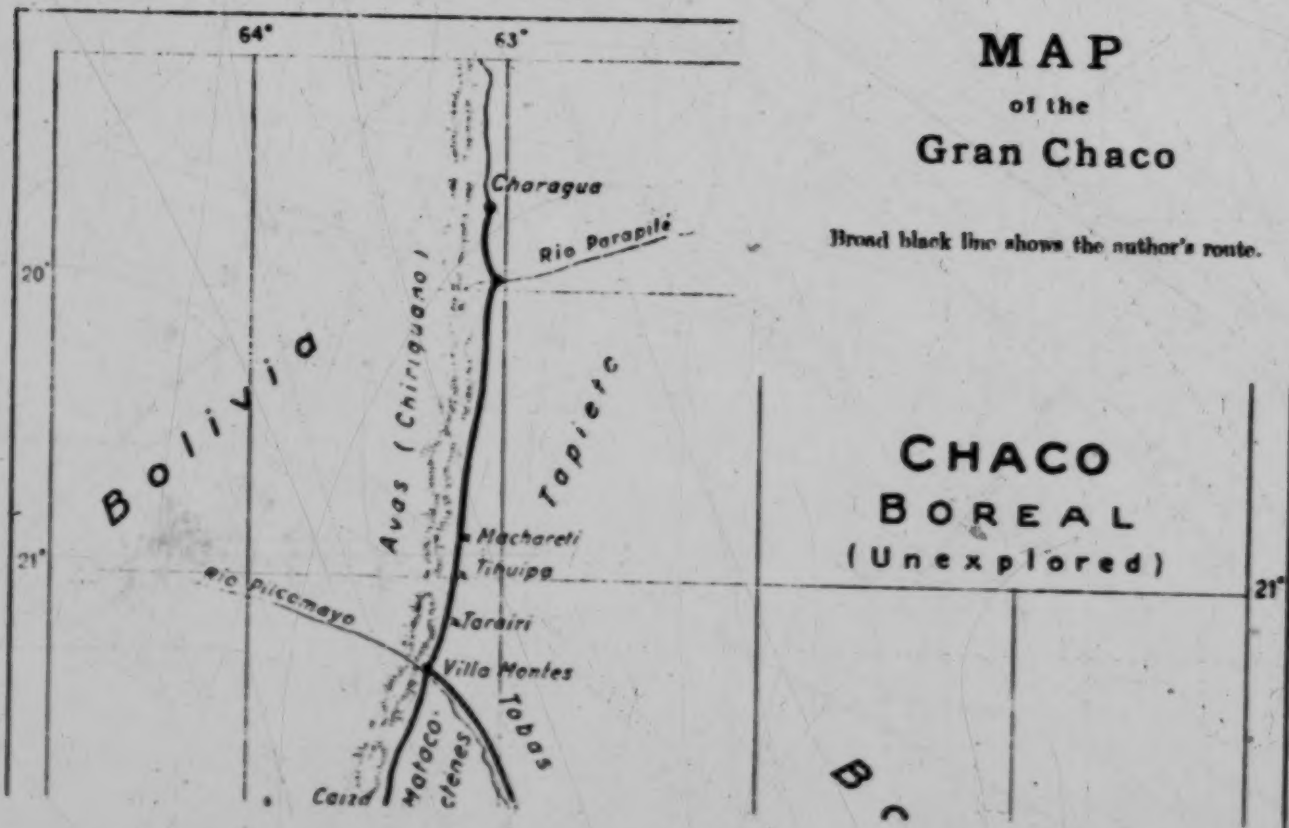
MAP of the Gran Chaco

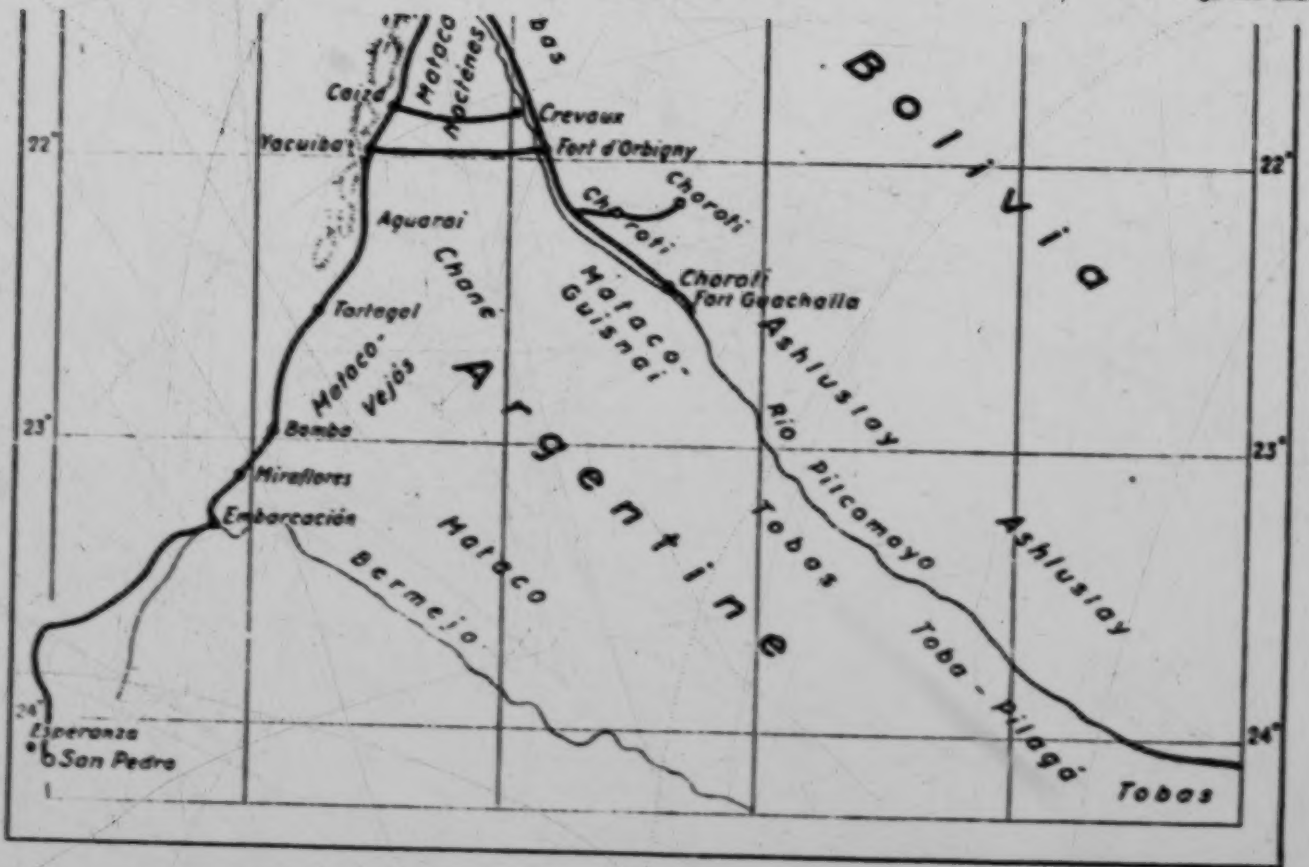
Broad black line shows the author's route.

CHACO
BOREAL
(Unexplored)

2: Karsten E.-S. (1911-1913) 1932 SIT Mataco SIT

[End Map(A)]





[End Map (B)]

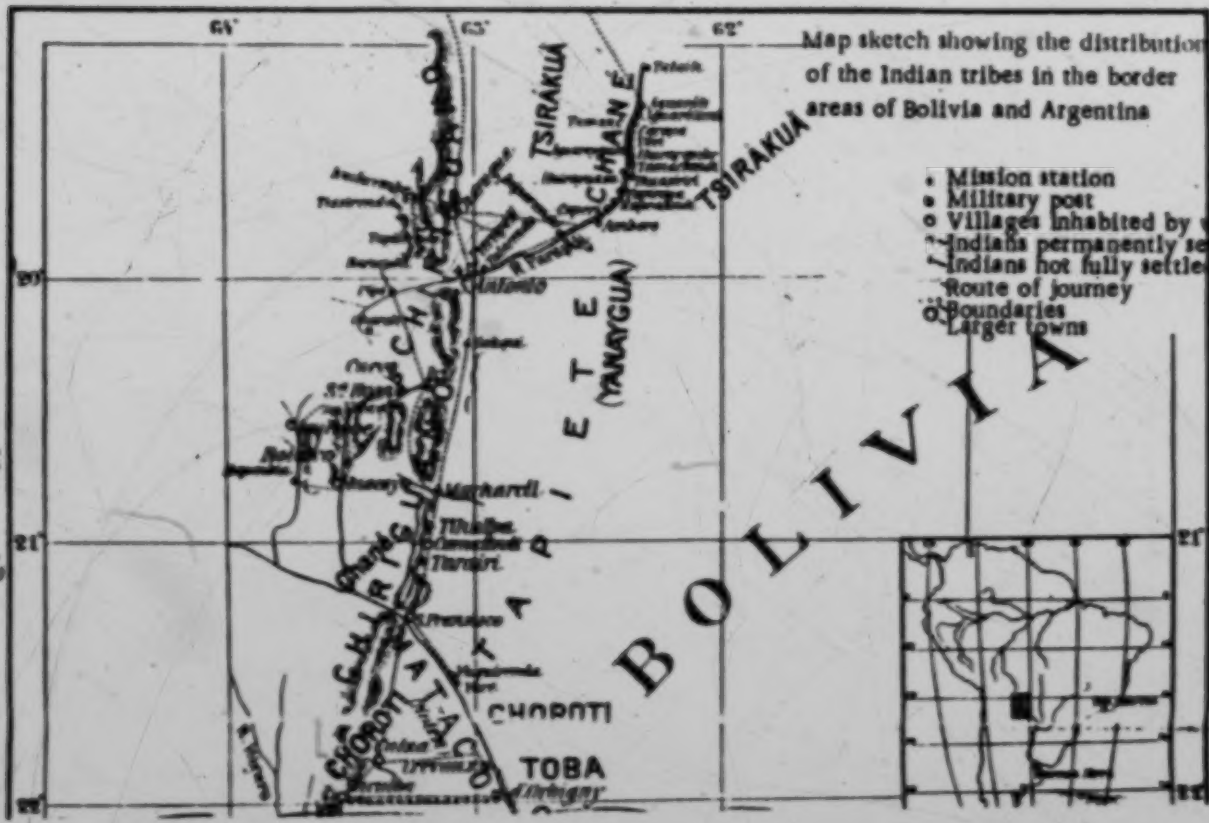
6: Nordenskiöld--156 E-5 (1908-1909) 1912 SF10 Chiguano SF10

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Chacoti SK6
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Map sketch showing the distribution of the Indian tribes in the border areas of Bolivia and Argentina

- Mission station
- Military post
- Villages inhabited by whites
- Indians permanently settled
- Indians not fully settled
- Route of journey
- Boundaries
- Larger towns



[End Map, (A)]

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End Map (B)

C: Nordenskiöld-157 E-6 (1908-1909) 1912 SF10 Chiriguano SF10
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 Choroti 516
 Choroti 518

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Mafaco 517

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[Facing p. 198 (A)]

Z: Meirauz E-4 (no date) 1946

514 Abipon 514
Mataco St 7



[Facing p. 198(B)]

